

Chapter 13

EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN

Our Pain

*I have tried to tell you what I'm feeling inside,
I kicked the dog, threw a tantrum, and cried.
My grades have fallen well far below
I have tried to tell you I'm feeling low.
I am a child, this is very true.
But I also have feelings just as you do.
Please listen to me; I have something to say,
Why does our love have to be this way?*

-Catherine Whitely, Women's Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh, 12/3/81

Children who have witnessed physical violence between the two people who are their most important sources of security and love are deeply affected. Given limited resources, the primary focus of domestic violence programs must most often remain on the battered woman. Nevertheless, services for children can help not only to alleviate some of the suffering of the individual children, but also to break an otherwise ongoing "cycle of violence."

LIVING IN A VIOLENT HOME

Children of abused parents often feel the need to help but they are, in fact, limited in what they can do. They cannot solve the violence problem in the family. Frustration, fear, and anger are often experienced by young people in this situation. Sometimes teenagers will feel disgusted with the abused parent for not "doing anything". This is, however, the very time when the abused person could benefit from the support, respect, and understanding of family members. Often an older child will want to intervene and rescue the abused parent, even to the point of becoming physically involved. This action may lead to further or more intense violence. Some alternatives to becoming physically involved are:

- Calling the police
- Contacting a neighbor or friend. The presence of a third party can often halt the abuse.
- Calling a domestic violence hotline for emotional support and services.

**Module 8 – Reading 3****The Parenting of Men Who Batter****The Franklin Family**

It's Saturday morning in the Franklin home. Breakfast is rushed because Marty, who is 12-years-old, and his sister, Rhonda, 9, have early soccer games. Their mother Donna is scurrying around while her husband Troy eats and reads the morning paper. Marty grumbles to his mother, "Ma, hurry up! I told you last week that the coach picks the starting players 20 minutes before game time."

His mother snaps back, "If you had washed your uniform last night like I asked you to, we wouldn't be in such a hurry." Rhonda pipes in, "I did mine."

Marty shoots his sister a dirty look and says, "Oh, I guess I just can't compete with goody two-shoes here. Hey, maybe my soccer suit is dirty, but at least I don't get the "Bitch of the Year Award."

Donna reacts sternly, saying, "Don't talk to your sister that way, young man!"

Troy now glances up from his paper, annoyed, "How the hell do you expect Marty to react? If he's not absolutely perfect, both of you are all over him."

"Never mind, Dad," Marty breaks in flippantly, "I'm used to it. If one of them isn't bitching at me, it's the other."

Donna's blood begins to boil as Troy returns to reading his paper. "Your son just called me a bitch. You're his father—you have nothing to say about it?"

Troy half rises out of his seat. "Yeah, I do have something to say. If you would conduct yourself like an adult, instead of getting all hysterical, things wouldn't get like this with the children. Don't be so damn sensitive. Marty didn't call you a bitch, he said you bitch at him, which is true. You do!"

Marty laughs. Rhonda does then, too, immediately feels ashamed toward her mother and turns red in the face. Their mother yells at Troy, "It's not me! You're the problem here, you're just encouraging his bad attitude."

Troy bounces out of his seat, yelling back, "That's enough out of you, you goddamned bitch!" and hurls his newspaper to the floor. He shoves Donna hard toward the kitchen door so she stumbles and falls. "Get the hell out of here now," he screams, "or you'll be sorry!"

Donna bursts into tears and runs up to the bedroom.

Marty and Rhonda are left trembling, although Marty forces a smile and mumbles to Rhonda, "What the hell does Mom expect?"

Children, regardless of age, are potential victims of verbal or physical abuse by either parent. When this happens, a confusing message is sent to the children. What they learn is that those who love them are also those who hit them. A child who is a victim of parental violence is much more likely as an adult to use or accept violence in family relationships.

Another equally damaging message is also sent. The child learns that violent behavior is a method of coping with frustration or that it can be an effective way to end an argument. This message is carried into their adult lives also.

VIOLENCE IN LANGUAGE

Violence in language permeates our lives. Consider the following, *"I'm going to kill you" "leave my things alone or I'll knock your block off" "My mother will murder me if I don't get right home." "Put that cookie back or I'll break your arm."* While some would discount these as mere expressions and figures of speech. True nonviolence must also be promoted in language so that children do not learn to use intimidation and fear to resolve conflicts.

The true effects of violent language are illustrated in this example. As a woman is pushing her three-year old in a stroller, the child drags her feet. Mother tells her child to stop, but the child continues. In frustration, the mother stops the stroller and says, *"If you drag your feet one more time, I'll cut them off."* Since the child is no longer dragging her feet, the mother assumes that the threat has worked. What she does not understand is that her child has missed an important lesson. Instead of learning to behave out of consideration for others, she has reacted out of fear of abuse.

This type of intimidation isn't limited to parents or other adults. Children learn from their parents, and are often verbally aggressive toward each other. Since society teaches us to see siblings as natural enemies, parents are often grateful when their children are verbally aggressive instead of physically aggressive with one another.

Threats and casual violent language should have no place in our communication with one another if we truly care for and respect the integrity of every person. But there is also another reason for eliminating violence in our language. It is out of respect for those people whose lives are surrounded with physical abuse.

Here are some suggestions for recognizing and modifying violent language in your life:

- Make a list of violent words and expressions you or others say.
- At the end of two weeks review the list. If you have a family, discuss it with them
- Decide what you will do to end the violence in your language. Include your family in this decision.
- Rephrase your most frequently used expressions, i.e. change "*I could die for a piece of pie*" to "*I would love a piece of pie.*"

-Adapted from Claudette K. McShane, from Family Living

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ITS EFFECT ON CHILDREN

Domestic Violence is a family problem. Children who live in a violent home are affected by the, violence, even if they are not being abused. They witness the violence, they are affected by their parent's attitudes, and they react by having their own feelings about the violence. **Children from domestic violence families maybe affected by the following:**

- ✓ For some children, the problems of domestic assault begin before they are born.
- ✓ Domestic violence families are often socially isolated; therefore parents may be the child's only role models available.
- ✓ The child learns that violence is an acceptable way to solve problems, and assumes that violence is the norms.
- ✓ The child blames himself/herself for causing the violence.
- ✓ Mom's helplessness communicates to the child that the violence is inevitable.
- ✓ The child sees few options.
- ✓ There tends to be violence toward their siblings and sometimes toward their parents in later life.
- ✓ The family moves frequently, often separating family members for periods of time.
- ✓ Children often experience school adjustment problems.
- ✓ Children tend to have difficulty establishing relationships with peers.
- ✓ Children are taught stereotypical sex roles.
- ✓ There are often role reversals in the family that confuse children as to who they are.
- ✓ The child frequently fantasizes "saving" their parents relationships.

- ✓ When this fails, they may fantasize escaping from home (running, early marriage, pregnancy, etc.)
- ✓ Children sometimes fantasize killing themselves and/or their parents (either father or mother) and sometimes attempt or complete suicide or homicide.
- ✓ The children are likely to continue the pattern of violence in their own adult
- ✓ Relationships.

--prepared by Donna Miller, M.S.W.

FEELINGS OF CHILDREN IN CRISES

Children are often told it is wrong to express their negative feelings, especially anger, toward their parents. However, children of domestic violent Families live with anger daily. They may be angry toward the abusive parent from the violent behavior and/or toward the mother for allowing or making it happen. Children will often identify more strongly with one parent than the other. Children identifying with the father often take his side and blame the mother for causing the violence. This child tends to believe what the father says, often losing respect for the mother. The children identifying with the mother often put blame on the father. Many children are caught in between and will blame themselves for causing the violence or not being able to stop it

- Scared of what's going to happen now
- Scared to return home to the violence;
- Scared that Dad will be angry at them because they left
- Scared that Dad does not love them anymore
- Scared that Mom left Dad because he did something wrong; so she may leave them if they do something Mom doesn't like
- Want to be with both Mom and Dad; confused about the mixed messages they receive from both parents
- Want to go home
- Scared of the new people in the shelter; confused about the new rules; confused about Mom not spanking them in the shelter
- Uncomfortable with not having any privacy; at having to share a room with Mom and siblings
- Confused about feelings they are having (happy to be away from home, not
- Wanting to see Dad, wanting everyone together, etc.)
- Having low self esteem, feeling worthless

BEHAVIORS TO EXPECT OF CHILDREN IN CRISES

A majority of the children do not have the ability or are afraid to put words to their feelings and concerns. Therefore, it is more likely to find the children acting them out and giving non-verbal clues. Attention seeking or withdrawn behaviors are often used by children to express their feelings and concerns.

Additionally, children often model their behavior after what they see their parents do. For instance, children may exhibit the helplessness they perceive in their mother, or they may imitate their father by using violence to solve problems. Children who come to our programs are in crisis as a result of the violence in their homes. Their behaviors are good indicators of how they are coping, and new problem behaviors are not unusual. Concern for the child is only necessary when the level of the behavior is in an extreme form.

Examples of these behaviors are as follows:

- ✓ loss of appetite; break in eating patterns
- ✓ sleep disturbances; nightmares, restlessness
- ✓ school problems; refusal to go, truancy, drop in performance
- ✓ withdrawal; stranger anxiety
- ✓ clinging to mom and siblings
- ✓ shyness
- ✓ fear of dark, bedtime acting out
- ✓ increased violent behavior; fighting, kicking, hitting
- ✓ verbally abusive, talking back
- ✓ regression; bed wetting, wanting the bottle, baby talk, thumb sucking
- ✓ inappropriate response to discipline
- ✓ temper tantrums
- ✓ whining
- ✓ over-sensitive; crying, intolerant to teasing
- ✓ role reversal; taking on parental role
- ✓ testing; pushing it to the limits
- ✓ stealing, lying
- ✓ stubbornness
- ✓ irregularity, diarrhea

It is extremely important to recognize children's behaviors as a means of telling us how they are. By helping the child understand his/her situation better working through his/her feelings surrounding that we can eliminate the necessity of those behaviors.

However, that is not to say that it is unnecessary to discipline a child. By allowing children to continue problem behaviors (i.e. fighting) without disciplining, we are telling them that their behavior is all right for them to do so.

--Adapted from Lancaster Shelter for Abused Women

WORKING WITH CHILDREN

CHILDREN NEED

CHILDREN NEED LOTS OF HUGS AND KISSES

CHILDREN NEED CLEAR AND CONSISTENT RULES

CHILDREN NEED YOU TO BE A POSITIVE PERSON

*CHILDREN NEED YOU TO MODEL SO THEY CAN LEARN RIGHT
FROM WRONG*

CHILDREN NEED TO BE FREE TO BE THEMSELVES

*CHILDREN NEED TO HAVE CHOICES ABOUT THEIR
BEHAVIOR*

*CHILDREN NEED CLEAR LIMITS SET BY ADULTS
IN THEIR LIVES,*

THEY NEED SOMEONE

*TO TEACH THEM HOW TO PLAY SAFELY AND
LIVE COOPERATIVELY*

CHILDREN NEED TO BE RESPECTED!

NON-VIOLENT

DISCIPLINE IS ESSENTIAL, SCREAMING

HITTING IN ANY WAY, OR THREATENING

ARE NOT EFFECTIVE MEANS OF DISCIPLINE

*CHILDREN NEED TO SPEND MEANINGFUL TIME WITH
YOU DOING FUN ACTIVITIES*

--Woman Place, Bucks County

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM IN SHELTER

Goals of Children's Programs in a Shelter/Safe house Setting

- 1. Provide safe, short-term housing for children whose mothers have been abused by a mate in an intimate relationship.**
 - ❖ To protect the confidentiality of residents.
 - ❖ To maintain a confidential address for the Safe house.
 - ❖ To enforce a no-hitting rule at the shelter.
 - ❖ To maintain and point out the security of the home.

2. Create an environment through which children can learn nonviolent behavior.

- ❖ To express negative emotion to children in a non-violent, non-threatening way.
- ❖ Demonstrate, model, and facilitate use of problem-solving processes with the children.
- ❖ Model, teach, and encourage physical and verbal expression of negative emotion in acceptable ways.
- ❖ Demonstrate an acceptance of negative emotion.
- ❖ Reward non-aggressive behavior while trying to remove rewards of aggressive behavior.
- ❖ Encourage children to look at the effects of violent and non-violent behavior on others.
- ❖ Provide children with a non-threatening, non-aggressive environment with enough play space, privacy, and variation to decrease tensions between children.
- ❖ Facilitate implementation of structured recreational activities with the children.
- ❖ Provide parent information that focuses on the importance of consistency and structure in children's lives.

3. Create an environment that allows for the enhancement of self - esteem.

- ❖ To provide individual, group, and family counseling.
- ❖ To provide opportunities to succeed and to acknowledge success.
- ❖ To provide each child with the opportunity to receive individual adult attention.
- ❖ To provide staff, volunteers, and parents information relevant to each child's assessed needs.

4. Provide children with accurate information relevant to domestic violence, child abuse, and any other topics relevant to them.

- ❖ To provide a structure that allows children to discuss the violence in their lives and to share experiences with each other.
- ❖ To explore with children various methods of coping with varied life situations
- ❖ To provide individual, group, and family counseling.
- ❖ To make this information available in various media.

- ❖ To help children to realize:
 - That they are not responsible for their parents' behavior
 - That theirs is not the only family with similar problems
 - No person deserves to be beaten
 - That they do not have the power to right their family's problems
 - That anger is OK when it is dealt with properly
- 5. To create an environment which encourages the enhancement of mother/child relationships.
 - ❖ To provide short-term individual and family counseling.
 - ❖ To model positive interactions between adults and children.
 - ❖ To share information with mothers about their children.
 - ❖ To provide parenting information via different forms of media (e.g., books, bulletin boards, handouts, and counseling).
 - ❖ To encourage the mothers to be involved in ongoing community programs that can serve as a support system for her as a parent.

--From Centre County Women's Resource Center

THE ROLE OF CHILDREN'S ADVOCATE

Critical Component

The social reality is that mothers alone are the most significant people in their children's lives. As a children's advocate, you are in the unique position of being able to support children by recognizing their mothers are always their best allies. Therefore, the best way you can support children is to also be an ally to their mothers. In this way, we hope that you can break down the isolation that nurtures the sexism, classism, racism and violence so prevalent all around us.

We believe that the Children's Program and Women's Program in the Shelter enter must be integrated and connected as directly as mothers and children are. If we are to really advocate for children we must recognize that what children need, primarily, are strong mothers who are empowered enough to respect, protect, and direct their children. Children are a critical component of most women's lives and, consequently, must become an equally critical component as we deal with battered women.

Children staying at the shelter or having left an abusive household with their mothers have been deeply affected by the prevalent cultural attitudes of permissive violence and sexism demonstrated in their families.

Sex-role expectations and learned patterns of adult behavior are greatly influenced by the model of an abusive father and a battered mother. A child's feelings of self-respect and respect for others are diminished through the experience of living with violence.

A primary need of children, as well as their mothers, is an environment that encourages having control over their lives. In our commitment to eliminate violent and sexist lifestyles, it is important that all shelter workers, hotline workers and, specifically, children's advocates, demonstrate a non-oppressive, non-violent and cooperative model for living together, with respect for each child and woman in our shelter.

From the crisis-intervention hotline perspective, it is necessary to be aware of the approach and understanding to the Child's Program Staff. Awareness of the shelter children's program will make it possible for you as a hotline worker to help a battered woman understand the type of care and instruction her children will receive at the shelter if she decides to come. It will also make it possible to provide advocacy to the caller who requests options in dealing with her children who have been exposed to domestic violence?

At times, when women arrive at the shelter with their children, staff hears comments such as, *"I don't know why they are acting this way, (crying, fighting, and clinging to mom's legs), and they don't do this at home.* We often tell women (on the hotline, also) that their children are, in fact, double victims of domestic violence. Even though they may never have seen their mother hit, they see the bruises and feel the tension she feels. Also, they may not understand why they must leave their homes, toys, beds, etc. They may not want to leave, but because mother is going, they must leave with her. Teenagers are particularly stressed by shelter housing as they are often in the middle of the school year and do not want to leave their friends. They will sometimes blame mother for the violence she has suffered.

At this time, the Children's Program Staff start to advocate for the children with their mothers by explaining some of the behavioral changes we see in children who have witnessed abuse.

It is important to recognize and deal with the child's fear of being in a home where violence may erupt. Such children feel very vulnerable although this may be hidden by a tough facade. Many children learn from their parents that violence is a way to solve problems. They often have not learned the skills of talking about their feelings, so they act them out. It is especially useful with some mothers to teach them to model this behavior by expressing their feelings to their children.

Some children react to violence in the home by withdrawing. Many have a tolerance for frustration and are easily upset and thrown off balance. They also have a difficult time separating their own identity since they are so caught up in these intense conflicts. This often results in difficulty with peers.

A common dilemma for the child is to be in the middle of the struggle between parents. At this time, staff often tells children that it is okay to love Daddy but what Daddy does to Mommy is not okay. Getting the father to be responsible for them is a major problem for both boys and girls.

Some children become involved in protecting their mothers from physical harm. This may result in their feeling angry at their fathers and, consequently, feeling guilty. It may result in resentment toward their mothers (disliking them for being weak, etc.) At this time, the Children's Program Staff would start working with the child on a protection plan by asking the following questions:

1. *What is the first number you would call in case of emergency?*
2. *If you ever hear or see your MOM being hit, what is the first thing you will do?*
3. *What are some places inside or outside of your home where*
4. *you can hide?*
5. *Do you know of any relatives, friends, or neighbors that you can call in case of an emergency?*

When staff asks these questions, they can generate topics of conversation with the child that will help to empower them should dangerous situations arise in their homes. It also helps to protect them physically as many children are unintentionally hurt by abusers who are striking out at mother, and children step in the way protect her.

The males desperately want their father's attention. They may relate to the father only on a play level. They make no demands for understanding or parental responsibility, and may actively side with the father against the mother. A high percentage of men who abuse their wives have had fathers who abused their wives.

Females also want their father's attention. They have often been severely punished for being angry or showing anger to their father. Nevertheless, they tend to identify with the aggressor, feel sorry for him, and tend to be angry with mother. When this occurs we explain ways to express feelings and that it is okay to be angry, but how that anger is expressed is important in our work. The females often grow up insecure with their ability to have men love and care about them.

Many learn fear and distrust and have difficulty forming equal partnerships in marriage. Such daughters may marry violent men as they have learned to expect abuse as normal and inevitable.

It is important to help the mother help the children deal with the realities of the father behavior. Many mothers, not wishing to turn their children against their fathers, protect the father and make excuses for his behavior. We must help mothers to deal more realistically so they can help their children face reality.

Help the mother to discuss honestly the new financial situation with the children. Many mothers hide the facts from children to avoid more worry and stress. Consequently, the children do not understand and cannot react appropriately.

Mothers who are under severe stress do not have the energy to nurture their children, so the children tend to be deprived and neglected of much needed attention at this time in their lives. It is important to give active support to such mothers, for instance, day care for younger children and supportive school counselors with older children, etc. It may be necessary to advocate for children within the local school system. When, as is often the case, the child acts out in school, the mother's tendency is to get angry with the child and punish him/her. It is important to give mothers help in understanding that this isolates the child and to show how she can support the child in his/her difficulty.

In most families, violence is never spoken of openly. Help the child and mother to talk about the abuse so they can share their fear, hurt, anger, etc. This may be the 'first' time the child may feel safe enough to discuss what he/she has witnessed at home. To explain misbehavior, parents might describe their children as "*spoiled*", "*bad*", or "*just like their father*". These labels may lead children to feel resentful and discouraged, and to engage in misguided efforts to have an important place in their family. It is best for a parent to look beyond the misbehavior and try to understand what the child has been feeling. With an understanding of the feelings which led to the misbehavior, the parent is able to guide and discipline the child in the most effective and appropriate way.

Parents can better understand why children misbehave by thinking about the result of the misbehavior in two ways. First, consider your own feelings and what the child has done. Second, consider the way the child responds to your efforts to correct them. The following may lead children to feel discouraged and with reason to misbehave.

NEED FOR ATTENTION

All children have a need for attention and try very hard to win it by pleasing their parents. However, if they do not receive in this way, they may try by irritating their parents. Children prefer to get attention for misbehavior than to be ignored. The best way to respond to the child is to begin being more attentive to good behavior while ignoring behavior that is annoying. Consider ways to give the child positive attention when they are not expecting it.

NEED TO FEEL MORE POWERFUL

It is discouraging for children to feel powerless when dealing with adults. They will try to assert themselves by saying, "You can't make me", or "I will if I want to". When a child acts this out, the parent tends to feel angry and threatened. If the parent tries to win the argument, the child may continue to be defiant or may obey the parent in a provoking, defiant matter. The best way to handle a power struggle with a child is to back off, stay calm, and encourage the child to cooperate with you. Fighting with the child only increases their need for power and will not solve the problem.

DESIRE FOR REVENGE

It is not unusual for children to feel so discouraged and hurt that they doubt that others love them. When this occurs, they may in turn hurt others as they feel they have been hurt. Parents should be aware that they are not necessarily the cause of this type of behavior.

Parents need to avoid criticism, punishment, or getting even. If they battle with the child, the child may eventually feel very hopeless and unlovable. It is best for parents to respond by showing love for the child.

It is important to be aware that each child wants to please her/his parents and be an important member of the family. Although parents do not cause their children to misbehave, problems can become worse if parents do not understand their children's needs and feelings. Responding to children appropriately can help them to behave appropriately, too.

--Adapted from the work of Frances Woods and Miriam Habit, *Women helping Women*, Metuchen, N.J., 1976, as found in *Training Manual, Women's Services*, Westmoreland County; written by JociTi Isen, developed by Jeannie Sims, adapted from *Systematic Training for Effective Parenting*

CHILDREN'S ISSUES

The Child's Relationship to the Abuser

Children who have lived in violent homes experience a great deal of confusion, which accompanies and often intensifies an already traumatic situation. When counseling children, it is important to recognize the complexity of their feelings, especially in regards to their mother and her abuser.

Before discussing with a child her/his feelings about the abuser, we must first establish her/his actual or perceived relationship to him. Is he her/his father? Is he the mother's lover or second husband, but not the child's father? If the latter is the case, how does the child view him? For instance, the child may still see him as her/ his father or father figure. On the other hand, the child may know and love her/his natural father and visit him regularly. In this case, the child may love or dislike the abuser.

A child whose father is not the abuser would feel understandably alarmed upon hearing that daddy hurt Mom. Obviously, a mistaken reference to the abuser as the child's father only serves to confuse the child further and to make an already complicated situation more difficult.

SELF ESTEEM

Everyone needs to know that they're "OK"! We value ourselves to the extent that we have been valued by others. If children have the opportunity to see themselves as worthwhile, important, smart people, then they will have an easier time putting themselves in worthwhile situations as they grow up.

Adults can help build self - esteem in all children by:

- Loving them and accepting them as they are
- Respecting and stressing the importance of their feelings
- Reinforcing their positive behavior (praising, hugging, and smiling)
- Providing an environment where they have the opportunity to succeed
- Giving them a sense of control over their lives by allowing them the freedom to choose whenever possible
- Giving them sometime each day to be alone with you and focus on the importance of your relationship.

COUNSELING CHILDREN

The children who come to our programs/shelter have grown up in homes where violence is the norm. Many have come to believe that there is a connection between love and abuse. They have observed styles of communication and methods of dealing with anger that can only serve to perpetuate the cycle of violence that has so dramatically interrupted their lives. It is our belief that in order to break this cycle, support and counseling must be provided to the children as well as the mothers.

In addition, a child's apparent needs and emotional responses to the crises of domestic violence often impact upon the mother's decision to stay in a violent family situation. For this reason it is critical to work with mothers in their parenting relationships as well as to begin to meet some of the children's immediate crisis needs.

The selections in this section address the issues involved in counseling children in domestic violence programs.

BEREAVEMENT and CHILDREN: An Emphasis on Empathy

Although adults usually learn how to "take care" of children, unfortunately, we sometimes haven't learned how to really listen to them and to respond in supportive ways. When young children suffer loss, a "helping-healing-relationship" might be the strongest support adults can offer.

In order for adult caregivers to be effective, it is necessary to establish "safe environments" for bereaved children that allow the freedom to express grief without the fear of judgment, isolation or abandonment. An essential helping quality is the ability to convey empathy to the grieving child. Empathy means being able to recognize and understand the child's inner feelings from the child's point of view. This means having the courage to become involved in the emotional suffering that is a normal part of the work of grief.

Empathy focuses exclusively on the child's feelings and assures the child that there is a supportive level of understanding from the adult. It does not require the adult experience the same emotions as the child--that would be sympathy--an over-involvement which is, fortunately, not necessary in order to be helpful.

Achieving a sense of merging or unity with the child requires a sensitivity to the "here and now" of the child's thinking and feeling world. To achieve this awareness means being open to not only what the child says,

but to the nonverbal cues, such as facial expression, tone of voice, gesture, and posture that may reinforce or even contradict his or her verbal message. Empathy is communicated when the bereaved child feels that you "understand." To simply say, "I understand how you feel" is not enough. Genuine empathy reaches the grieving child where he or she is emotionally right now, with the result that the child feels understood and supported.

But understanding by itself is not enough. The adult must also accurately convey that understanding to the child. The ability to let children know that their feelings are understood helps them feel secure, trusting, warm, and affirmed. This ability is the essence of a "helping-healing-relationship." Sometimes adults fear that by acknowledging anger, sadness, fear, loneliness, hurt and guilt in grieving children they will only "make matters worse". Such hesitation is generally a defensive form of self-protection for the adult who finds it threatening to respond at the emotional level.

However, just because feelings seem threatening doesn't mean the bereaved child should be encouraged to avoid expressing them. When a sensitive, caring adult encourages children to acknowledge and talk about feelings, they are comforted to discover the adult as someone with whom it is safe to explore such scary feelings.

We should never avoid what a grieving child is feeling because we are afraid he or she cannot "take it". Obviously, the child is already "taking it". The only real question is "Will the child experience these feelings in isolation or in the comfort of loving adults?" To allow grieving children to live alone during their time of grief is to mismanage a helping opportunity. The ability of caring adults to communicate accurate empathy has a number of benefits for the child whose life has been touched by death. Among them are the following:

- ❖ *A truly helping relationship can only be built on the foundation of empathetic communication with the child.*
- ❖ *The child who feels empathetically understood is more likely to share deep and personal feelings.*
- ❖ *An adult's genuine commitment to understanding creates a trusting, low threat environment for the child, which takes away the need for self-protection or isolation.*
- ❖ *When a child has been made to feel safe in exploring his or her own feelings, the first step has been taken toward understanding and reconciliation of grief.*
- ❖ *Empathy makes it possible for children to clearly understand thoughts and feelings that may have been puzzling before.*

- ❖ *While adults may possess tremendous amounts of knowledge about grief without empathy there is no base upon which healing can occur. It is the foundation upon which the following other helping qualities are built.*

RESPECT

An adult's respect for a child means caring for and affirming the child as a separate person without being possessive. The sensitive adult will be receptive to the notion that the "child will do the reaching" about his or her grief experience. Any defenses or normal resistance to the expression of grief are best met with patience and understanding of the function they are serving in the child's mind.

Respect also means never purposely damaging or hurting a grieving child's self esteem. It is important to have a sense of "working with the child" toward healing grief's hurts. The opposite of this respect would be the adult who assumes that a "superior knowledge of grief" qualifies him or her to project what is best for the child to think, feel, and do.

ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance means supporting, understanding, and accepting the child, while in no way judging his or her behavior during this stressful time. Acceptance does not suggest approval or disapproval. It simply means that each child is a unique person, deserving of respect and acceptance. Non-judgmental acceptance requires awareness that grieving children may ask questions or make remarks that are shocking or seem irrelevant to adults. The ability of loving adults to respond without shock or embarrassment helps the child to feel unconditionally loved.

The child should also be allowed the opportunity to be involved in the decision-making process regarding such matters as attending the funeral, viewing the body, and visiting the grave. Obviously, age and other influences will vary the degree to which children are able to participate, but their need to feel involved still exists and should be encouraged by adult caregivers.

WARMTH AND CARING

Adult warmth and caring is expressed through a sense of personal closeness to the child. Remember, two-thirds of all communication is nonverbal, and behavior always speaks louder than words. Tone of voice, eye contact, posture of involvement, facial gestures, and physical comfort are but a few of many non-verbal ways of communicating. As the saying goes, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

This is particularly true with grieving children who are instinctively sensitive to who understands and cares and who does not. Love, patience, and the ability to hear and respond to the child's needs are the qualities that are most important.

(For those adults who have had no previous contact with the bereaved child, sincere expressions of warmth and caring are particularly helpful in the initial building of a supportive relationship.)

SELF- AWARENESS

For adult caregivers, self-awareness means understanding how one's own experiences with loss might influence the capacity to be emotionally available to the bereaved child. Adults who are able to separate their own needs from the needs of the child they wish to help will be better prepared to enter into the caring relationship effectively.

Helpers who are self-aware may ask themselves:

- ❖ *Does this child's experience with loss remind me of some of my own losses?*
- ❖ *Am I hearing what this child is saying, or am I projecting my own thoughts and feelings?*
- ❖ *Am I expecting this child to have the same response to loss that I have?*
- ❖ *Where can I share the feelings that are stimulated in me as I support this child in grief?*

Self-awareness also gives adult caregivers an opportunity to learn what a bereaved child has to teach them about being helpful at this time.

DESIRE TO UNDERSTAND

To be effective in helping a child learn and grow from loss, the adult must understand what the "inner world" of the child's experience is like. While the adult may not totally understand the child's world of grief, the child will usually sense a desire to understand, and will be very forgiving, even of adults who might say and do some things that are potentially destructive to the helping process. However, if the child senses a lack of adult interest in attempting to understand, the most valiant of care-giving efforts will often go unnoticed.

From the child's standpoint, communication involves either talking about thoughts and feelings, or acting them out through behaviors. However, sending out a message does not insure the completion of the communication process. The child

must believe that the message has been received and understood by the adult before the process is complete.

Children's expressions of grief are frequently seen in action, not words. This highlights a need to search for and understand the meaning attached to a child's effort to communicate.

FINAL THOUGHT

In addition to the communication of empathy, the five qualities described above have the potential to create a healing environment that encourages the open sharing of grief between people of all ages. Beyond these qualities are perhaps an attitude that grief is not an enemy to overcome, but a privilege to be experienced as a result of having loved.

--by Alan I. Wolfeit, Ph.D., from: Bereavement Magazine: A Magazine for Hope and k / i q , February and March/April 1988 issues.

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EMPOWERING CHILDREN

Empowerment is as positive a force with children as it is with adults. Although totally dependent on adults during infancy, children have increased capabilities as they grow, becoming gradually more adept at processing information, forming choices, and taking appropriate action. As children gain skills, the right/power of adults to censor information, limit choices and restrict actions lessens. For example, a ten-year-old can make more complex decisions and can take more responsibility for her/his actions than a five-year-old. By seventeen, a "child" has gained almost complete independence and therefore has a right to her/his own personal power. The balance of power between an adult and a child is directly related to the extent of the child's dependence.

Adults misuse power when they are overprotective of children and thereby deny children their own legitimate personal power. For instance, children are often told that Daddy beats Mommy because he has a "problem" or is "sick". Daddy may not seem sick to the child and his actions may not seem excusable as a problem. A child who has witnessed abuse wants and deserves a clear explanation of what is happening. *-Daddy is controlling Mommy by hurting her.*

In empowering children, it is important to steer away from overly repressive or overly liberal attitudes. Repressive attitudes assume that children exercise too much control over their parents, and consequently deny children the freedom and open communication that they need. On the other hand, liberal attitudes give children more freedom than they can handle or than the parent is willing to allow. For instance a mother may ask her toddler, "Are you ready to go?" When in reality,

it is not have a choice. If her child is not ready to leave, the mother faces the possibility of a confrontation and my have to force the child to leave.

The key to empowering children is respect. We must show our respect in our tone of voice; in open communication that validates the child's feelings and does not minimize her/his situation; in fair, consistent discipline techniques; in honest answers to questions; and in clear descriptions of the rules we have and the limitations we place on children. Above all, we must respect children by recognizing that their needs for compassion, understanding, and information are as great as the needs of their mothers.

IDENTIFYING ABUSED CHILDREN

Abuse cannot be identified by racial, ethnic, or socio-economic class. All children are potential victims because of their vulnerable, powerless position in our culture. Children often don't tell about abuse for a variety of reasons, such as:

- They don't know whom to tell.
- They are afraid that no one will believe them.
- They are afraid of what will happen.
- They suffer fear of being blamed.
- They lack the vocabulary and don't know how to tell.

Therefore, it is important for those of us working with children to keep in mind the possibility of child abuse or child sexual assault. Children who are abused of ten do share common characteristics. Behaviors and characteristics that typically may be exhibited by a child victim of abuse, or child sexual assault are listed below. Keep in mind hat even if someone exhibits several of these behaviors, it does not necessarily mean that they have been abused. Many of the characteristics below may be apparent in a child who is a victim of child sexual assault or of physical, verbal or emotional abuse. Those characteristics particular only to child sexual assault are marked with an asterisk and are in bold type.

ABUSED CHILDREN OFTEN:

- Fearful of interpersonal relationships
- Withdrawn
- Consistently irritable
- Affectionless
- Overly compliant
- Overly aggressive

- Hyperactive
- Listless and detached
- Overly affectionate (misconstrued as seduction)
- Excessively dependent, clinging

PHYSICAL INDICATORS:

- Bruises, burns, continuing injuries
- Chronic ailments, stomachaches, vomiting, etc.
- Cessation of menses
- Venereal disease*
- Urinary infections*
- Bruises or bleeding in external genitals (Vaginal, anal or oral regions)*
- Swollen or red vulva, anus, perineum*
- Pain or itching in genital area*
- Is pregnant*

ACTIVITY OR HABIT CLUES:

- Sudden change in attitude towards a person
- Sleeping disturbances, nightmares
- Suddenly needing night light
- Child afraid to go home, or to a certain place
- Constant hand manipulation of genitals
- Running away
- Stealing, lying, engaging in delinquent acts
- Low self esteem
- Child describing self as bad
- Self -mutilation
- Poor peer relationships
- Engages in fantasy
- Suicide attempts
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Arriving early at school, leaving late
- Overly seductive behavior - i .e. promiscuous or prostitution*
- Return to babyish behavior; consistent thumb – sucking

- Bed-wetting
- Excessive bathing or total refusal to bathe*
- Refusal to eat
- Learning disabilities
- Truancy
- Hysteria
- Phobias; fear of dark, public restrooms, etc.
- Sudden crying spells
- Unexplained sadness or confusion
- Daydreaming excessively
- Drop in academic performance
- Explicit knowledge of sexual acts (that is age-inappropriate)*
- Depression
- Heavy childcare responsibilities
- Heavy regular household responsibilities
- Being isolated from peers
- Overly restricted social activities
- Caretaker of child exhibiting extreme over-protectiveness or jealousy of child

CRISES INTERVENTION WITH CHILDREN

GOALS

- Protect the child.
- Help the child recover.
- Protect other children from offender.

OBJECTIVES

- To assess child's safety needs.
- To find out what the child wants from you.
- To validate the child's feelings.
- To assure the child that: you care, you are still a friend and the child is not to blame.
- To let the child know she/he has a right to be safe
- To let the child know what action you will take.

WHEN YOU ARE FACED WITH A CHILD WHO HAS BEEN ASSAULTED

It is often difficult to know how to respond. Below are some guidelines to help you and the child through this crisis period.

LISTEN

- Always be calm. Your reaction makes a difference.
- Believe what you are hearing. Too often children lack credibility. Hear the child in a nonjudgmental way.
- Deal with explicit language. Children may use explicit terminology when discussing her/his situation. Be prepared. Try and use this language too.
- Do not avoid embarrassing subjects. Let the child know that everything can be talked about.
- Do not project or assume anything. Let the child tell the story, leave your own assumptions out.

NON -VIOLENT BEHAVIOR

"No Hitting" Policy

When women come to the shelter with their children, they are coming because the violence in their lives is no longer acceptable. Many times they come when the violence is directed not only at them, but at their children as well. Many women come when they see their children interacting with the same power dynamic which exists between them and their abusers: their sons hitting and oppressing their daughters, and their older, stronger children hitting and oppressing their younger, weaker children. They recognize, on some level, that their children are learning that violence is an acceptable way to achieve control.

Children who have come to the shelter have not always been the targets of abuse, but all of them have witnessed the abuse of their mothers by their fathers, on some level. They have also seen that a person who uses violence as a means of control usually gets his/her way that violence is condoned and promoted in the media; and those violent actions get results. Perhaps violent actions do not solve problems, but they do effect change in a short-term way.

Spanking is hitting, hitting is violence. There are few people who would openly condone violence against children, yet 90% of all children in America are spanked. Most children who come to the shelter have been spanked, and many others know no other form of discipline. When we ask them not to hit their children while in the shelter, we frequently remove their only means of control. So

we must offer them a clear explanation of why we do not allow hitting as a form of discipline, and extensive support and encouragement as they employ this alternative.

When we tell women to stop hitting their children, we must be willing to reinforce this view on a daily basis. We cannot look away as she spansks her child, nor can we turn a deaf ear when she threatens her child. We must follow through speaking to her.

We can take her aside, talk to her about the importance of not hitting, and ask her if she needs help with non-violent alternatives. We can also explain to her that if we see or hear of her doing this again that she may be asked to leave the shelter.

We can help her to stop hitting her children by recognizing and affirming the positive ways in which she deals with her children, and the special ways she has of being a "good Mom".

We must also let the mother know that this will be a revolutionary change for her and her children and that this will not happen overnight. It is time-consuming and potentially frustrating to change, yet, consistently and diligently applied, it will yield positive results within six months to a year.

Another form of violence that requires correction is children hitting their mothers. Not only are children used to the violence that has surrounded them, but also mothers are often so used to being hit that they barely notice the annoying smack of a child. It is important for mothers to understand that although this violence seems minor, it is full of meaning. It shows lack of respect, which is wholly unacceptable. The mother can eliminate this behavior by explaining this change to her child and forming a pact for both of them to stop hitting. For instance, if the child hits, she/he must refrain from sweets; if the mother hits, she must refrain from coffee.

Both mother and child need to learn that it is okay to be angry and to talk about their feelings. Together they can develop a way to do this. They may choose to set aside few minutes each day to talk about the different ways they have felt angry. For example, Johnny may tell his mother that it makes him angry when she is on the phone and will not get him a drink. His mother might tell him that it makes her angry when she cannot talk on the phone without being disturbed. When they begin this, they may need assistance.

We must be prepared to facilitate these same discussions as well as model appropriate non-violent discipline ourselves. In raising children, our goal is that they become independent, responsible adults. Instead of punishing them for bad behavior, we should discipline them to choose acceptable behavior over unacceptable behavior. This means setting clear limits, explaining why the behavior is not acceptable, and showing the child that every choice has a positive

or negative consequence. When a child's behavior is corrected, she/he needs to know her/his responsibility for that change. Overall, we can empower children by showing them they can control both their behavior and the consequences that result.

In disciplining children, it is important to designate in advance a specific consequence for the behavior in question. Every instance of misbehavior should meet with a consistent, predictable response. One action should be addressed at a time (a child should not be disciplined for several actions at once). Moreover, discipline should be administered immediately after the child has misbehaved, and the child should be reminded that her/his deliberate choice has caused this consequence.

There are a number of alternatives to violent discipline, and their effectiveness often depends on the child's age and what she/he sees as important or motivational. Younger children tend to respond well to "time-out", while older children may respond more readily to the withdrawal of privileges, such as the loss of their favorite TV show, the denial of a favorite treat, or a missed opportunity to spend time with a friend.

When withdrawing privileges, the mother should take care not to punish herself by denying privilege that she shares with the child (i.e. going outside on a sunny day).

Regardless of the discipline used, always make sure that the child understands that you dislike with the behavior, not the person.

TIME OUT INFORMATION

Time-out is a specific technique that is used as a method of setting (reinforcing) limits. In time-out, the child is removed from enjoyable or pleasant surroundings for a short period of time as a result of the child doing a specific behavior that is not appropriate. Explain the time-out rules to the child before you have to use it the first time.

Always give one warning, telling the child exactly what he/she is doing wrong and what the result will be if they choose to continue this behavior. (E.g., *Lynn, you are throwing sand. If you throw sand once more, you will have to go to time-out.*)

If the child repeats the behavior, take her/him to time-out firmly being as matter-of-fact as possible. As the child goes to the time-out chair, tell them again why they are going to time-out using your normal tone of voice (e.g., because you threw sand, and sand can get in someone's eyes and hurt them, you have to go to time-out). **Do not use physical pain** as part of time out (i.e. not shake the child or pinch and squeeze their hand as you take them.) Put the child in the time-out chair

for five minutes.

The time-out chair should be in a quiet part of the house, not in the middle of family activity. A rarely used hallway or corner of the room is usually best. It is important that the time-out chair not be in a place that is pleasant or fun to the child (e.g., not where the child can see TV, get the attention of other people, or play with toys, books, puzzles, etc.). Time-out should not be in a closed closet, and if possible, not in a bathroom or bedroom.

The length of time-out should be different for children of different ages. The younger the child, the shorter the time-out stay. For children 3-6 years old, five minutes the longest time for time-out. Research shows that time-out longer than seven minutes is no more effective than time-outs of five minutes.

For a child of any given age, keep the time-out the same for each discipline. Do not increase the length of time-out for each time it is used again and again (e.g., even if a five year old has to go in time-out five times in one evening, each time-out should be the standard five-minute length). A kitchen timer is ideal for time-out; however, using a watch or clock is fine. Never let the child use the time-out timer as a toy.

While the child is in time-out, try not to pay attention to anything he/she may do (e.g., screaming, crying, and name-calling) except getting up from the chair. For many children, just sitting in one place for a certain period of time will be an accomplishment.

The child needs to stay on the chair during the time-out. If they get up, tell her/him that because she/he got up from the chair, you are adding one minute to if necessary, you may need to hold the child in the chair (especially younger children, and particularly the first few times time-out is applied). When adding minutes to the timer for getting out of the chair, try not to go longer than ten minutes for the total time.

As the child leaves time-out, at the first chance catch her/him doing something good and compliment them. That is, say something good about what you see the child doing especially if it relates to the behavior she/he went to time-out for (e.g., *Hey, Lynn, you're really having fun with that sand and you're not throwing it, that's great!*). Be specific about what the child is doing that is positive.

Do not pay attention to obnoxious, irritating behaviors if the behavior is not hurting anyone. (E.g., try to ignore behaviors such as whining, making irritating noises, etc.) If you want the child to do or not do something, first try asking the child.

Use punishments that are related to the behavior, as a way of setting limits for a particular problem behavior. (I.e. the consequence of throwing food at the table could be having to leave the table for a period of time or cleaning the floor. Consequence of not brushing teeth could be not eating favorite sweets.)

- ❑ Never make threats that you cannot or are not willing to follow through on.
- ❑ Never give repeated warnings--never more than one.
- ❑ Never use threats of a violent nature.
- ❑ Limits should remain the same as unchanging rules, and limits should always be enforced in the same manner (e.g., bedtime is always at a certain time, toys should always be picked up, hitting is never allowed, etc.)

The shelter is a new environment and all normal children will explore and test the limits of new environment. As mothers, staff, and volunteers, we need patience in dealing with children around these issues. Many children in the shelter have not had any rituals, routines and consistency for a long time, and possibly never, in their lives. Shelter life can become very chaotic, and setting limits for, possibly, the first time may be difficult.

--Adapted from *M Hittiry the Oifdren*, by Margaret Bogren, Women's Services; and *Limit Settiry*, revised by Judy Grundy for Title I Domestic Violence Project Material Suggestions for Teaching and Guiding Your Child without Spanking

SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING AND GUIDING YOUR CHILD WITHOUT SPANKING

DISCIPLINE means Guidance not punishment.

GUIDANCE means help in learning how to behave toward persons and things.

Being firm but kind will cause the child to cooperate more often than using harsh, angry words.

Set a good example. Your child learns what is right and wrong by your own actions and attitudes.

Give the child a choice whenever possible (as long as the choices are acceptable to you.)

Example: Would you rather wear the red shirt or the blue one?

Then accept the child's decision.

Give 5 or 10 minutes notice before interrupting an activity. For example: *"You need to finish your drawing and wash your hands before dinner."*

Frequently renew your children's opportunities for play. Be sure they have toys and art supplies suitable for their age so that they do not act "naughtily" simply because they are bored. Even small babies get bored when they have nothing to look at or hold. When you have to take the child with you to the doctor, dentist;

Etc., remember to take along books and small toys to keep the child occupied.

Focus on "DO'S" instead of "DON'TS"

Telling a child what not to do does not prepare him/her for what to do. Translate the don't into do's to show them a more acceptable way to act. For example:

WRONG WAY:

Don't throw the ball

Stop hitting!

RIGHT WAY:

Roll the ball on the floor.

Talk to him--tell him what you want.

Just look.

Give your child attention for the positive or good things he/she does so that he/she will not misbehave just to get attention.

Build feelings of confidence. It is important for children to develop a feeling that they are able to do things that they are capable and worthwhile people. A "can do" feeling builds confidence. Belittling experiences destroy self-confidence,

SITUATION	BELITTLING	CONSTRUCTIV
<i>Peter spills the garbage he is emptying.</i>	<i>Can't you EVER do anything right?</i>	<i>That's hard; let's do it e This way and it won't spill.</i>
<i>Suzie cries in frustration.</i>	<i>I said that wouldn't work.</i>	<i>Let's do this together.</i>

Change the environment to change behavior.

Look for the cause of misbehavior. Sometimes changing the environment will solve situations that frustrate children and irritate parents.

Example:

If Sally spills milk at every meal, change the environment by providing a different type of glass. Perhaps a heavy bottomed, wide glass will reduce tipping. Or put a small amount of milk in the glass. If this does not work, watch carefully to see what causes the tipping.

If Betty and Bob kick one another at the table, change the environment by rearranging the seating. Have Betty sit at one end of the table and Bob at the other end so their feet cannot "accidentally" hit one another.

Listen to yourself and to your child

Parents who stop now and then to listen to themselves, receive clues about their methods of guidance. If you find yourself saying, "*If I've told you a dozen times,*" stop and think. Obviously, this method is not working. It may be wise to try a new approach. If something does not work in business or industry, responsible management does not keep doing it over and over the same way. Instead the situation is analyzed and then new approaches are tried. This method is also appropriate in the guidance of children.

If you listen to children, you will receive some clues about what they have been learning. You will also receive clues about what they are feeling. Try hard to listen for feelings that may be hidden in what a child actually says. The more often you show understanding toward a child's feelings, the more often he/she will feel close and loving toward you.

Show your love to children in ways they can understand. Parents show their love to children by doing for them. They make them eat food that which is "*good for them*", go to bed early, wear a coat, and all the many other things necessary in caring for children. However, the child may not interpret this as love.

A warm, friendly smile, a hug, or kisses are needed every day. Kind words are needed every day. For instance, "*I love you,*" "*I like your drawing,*" etc. Some of your undivided attention is needed every day. Read a story or listen to your child. Talk and play with him.

BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES TO USE WITH CHILDREN

1. Problem Solving

Ask: *What did you do?*

What happened because of it?

What else could have done?

What might have happened if you did it that way?

2. Ask child to help solve the problem.

3. Discuss logical consequences.

4. Make charts for positive behavior.

5. Use "I" messages.

Make reference to: *behavior, feelings and consequences*

6. Use the time-out chair

tell the child why she/he is being placed there

- give a set amount of time (short periods - 5 or 10 minutes)
7. Touching
place your hand on her/his shoulder or arm.
 8. Make eye contact.
 9. Counseling--
use reflective listening technique.
make playtime also a talk time.
 10. TAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF!

MINIMIZING AGGRESSION IN CHILDREN

- *Parents should remember that they are important models for their children.*
- Physical punishment for misbehavior should not be used.
- Clear disapproval of violence, such as on TV can reduce the likelihood of imitation, particularly by older children.
- Parents should intervene when the child is acting aggressively. Their failure to do so may be interpreted by the child as implicit approval.
- When aggression occurs, or is about to occur, parents should help the child find a nonviolent, alternative behavior. For example, a parent might say *"Tommy, ask Beth if she will trade toys."*
- Physical aggression may be suppressed by using omission training (parents reward children for not fighting for a certain time period-- *"Thanks, Tommy and Beth for not fighting this whole morning"*) and reasoning methods. At the same time, alternate responses (Tommy asks Beth to trade) should be praised whenever they occur. For a young preschool child, a concrete reason is more effective
- (*Don't play with the toy because you might break it*) than no reason (*"Don't touch that"*) or abstract reasons (*"It belongs to someone else."*)
- Older children can be helped to, see the effect of their behavior on someone else *You wouldn't like it if you bought a toy and then someone stole it from you, would you?"*)
- Aggression--related toys (for example, guns and knives) lead to heightened aggressive behavior both while the toys are present and after they are removed.

By Dr. Honore Hughes, adapted from *Childhood: The Study of Development*, Robert Leve, and Random House, 1980



Module 8 – Reading 2

Fact Sheet on Children Exposed to Intimate Violence Against Their Mothers

- Millions of children in the U.S., between the ages of 3 and 17, are at risk of exposure to parental violence each year (Carlson, 1984; Silvern, 1995; Straus, 1992).
- 70% of men who abuse their female partners also abuse their children (Bowker, Arbitell, & McFerron, 1988).
- The vast majority of children whose mothers are abused are aware of the abuse, whether they have directly witnessed it or not (National Center on Women and the Law, 1990).
- Battering men often use custodial access to the children as a tool to terrorize battered women or to retaliate for separation (Finkelhor, Hotaling, & Sedlak, 1990).
- Children who have both witnessed and been victims of abuse have shown higher distress levels than children who only witnessed abuse, and/or children who have not experienced violence in the home (Jouriles & Norwood, 1995; McCloskey, Figueredo & Koss, 1995; Holden, 1998).
- Of boys aged 11-20 who commit homicide, 63% kill the man who is abusing their mother (The War Against Women: Overcoming Female Abuse, 1985)
- Children exposed to violence against their mothers are at higher risk for both externalizing (e.g., delinquency and aggression) and internalizing problems (e.g., anxiety and depression) relative to children from nonviolent homes (Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003).
 - HOWEVER, a recent meta-analysis of studies found that the average study-level effect size indicates that about 63% of child witnesses were faring more poorly than the average child who had not been exposed. This means that 37% showed outcomes that were similar to, or better than, non-witnesses (Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003).
- An evaluation of a support & education group for children exposed to domestic violence found that the children improved their self-concepts, understood that violence in the home was not their fault, became more aware of protection planning, and learned new ways of resolving conflict without resorting to violence (Gruszinski, Brink, and Edleson, 1988).
- Battered women have been found to be no more likely than other women to physically discipline their children (Holden, et al., 1998; Sullivan et al., 1998).

**Module 8 – Reading 4**

Common Tactics

Abusers Use Post-Separation to Hurt Women Through Their Children

- Picking children up late, returning them late, or missing visits altogether.
- Returning children from visits hungry, dirty, and/or tired.
- Constantly asking children for information about their mothers: who she is spending time with, what she is doing, what she is saying about the abuser, etc.
- Undermining her parenting by allowing the children to do things the mother forbids; having different (or no) rules when the children are with him; being especially permissive so they will begrudge the rules their mothers enforce.
- Threatening to take the children away from her.
- Continually trying to change the custody or visitation arrangements, keeping her tied up in courts (and legal fees).
- Hurting the children physically, sexually, or emotionally as a way to hurt their mother.
- Threatening that any of the visits could be the last time she'll ever see the children because he'll either run away with them or kill them.
- Telling the children that their mother is responsible for the family being separated.
- Telling the children that their mother is responsible for how little time he gets to spend with them.
- Frequently leaving the children with others (his mother, his girlfriend, a friend) during his visitation time.
- Endangering the children by showing up drunk when he picks them up or drops them off, not dressing them appropriately for the weather, or not giving them their medication, etc.



Module 8 – Reading 5

ASSESSING RISK TO CHILDREN FROM BATTERERS

Lundy Bancroft and Jay G. Silverman (2002)

*Synopsis written by Rus Ervin Funk, MSW
Center for Women and Families, Louisville, KY*

This article examines the risk to children from men who batter, as well as offers ways to assess the risk that children face.

This article begins by clarifying that the risk to children from men who batter does not decrease once there has been a separation. In fact, the risk to children may actually increase (citing Bancroft and Silverman, 2002, and Langford, Isaac and Kabat, 1999). The authors of his current article suggest that while men who batter and their abused partners are together, battered women may act in ways to mediate and protect children from the violence and abuse of men who batter.

From here, the authors list the sources of possible physical and psychological injury to children as a result of their contact with men who batter:

- Risk of exposure to threats or acts of violence towards their mother
Children witness a large percentage of physical and sexual violence as well as threats; and may be physically injured during such assaults.
- Risk of undermining mother-child relationships
One battering tactic is to use the children and undermine the relationship between the child and the mother. The relationship between the child and the non-abusive parent can also prove to be a mediating factor to the degree of trauma experienced by children who are exposed to violence.
- Risk of physical or sexual abuse by the batterer
Numerous studies indicate that men who batter pose a greater threat to physically or sexually abuse their children than non battering fathers.
- Risk to the children of the batterer as a role model
Sons of men who batter are at increase risk to perpetrate domestic violence, and daughters who are exposed to domestic violence have a harder time seeking assistance.
- Risk of rigid/authoritarian parenting
Men who batter typically are severely controlling towards their children and uses harsh, rigid and disciplinary style of parenting which can intimidate children and restimulate traumatic memories of the violence.
- Risk of neglectful or irresponsible parenting
Men who batter tend to be selfish and self-centered making it difficult for them to focus on the needs of their children.
- Risk of psychological abuse and manipulation
Men who batter tend to have verbally abusive parenting styles, and are known to use children as a tactic of their abuse. Their use of children can increase post separation.
- Risk of abduction
Most parental abductions take place in the context of domestic violence (Grief and Hegar, 1993).

Assessing Risk to Children from Batterers

- Risk of exposure to violence in their father's new relationship
Men who batter don't stop their abusive behaviors when starting new relationships. Children who continue to have a relationship with their father are at increased risk for witnessing his abusiveness towards new dating partners.

Next, these authors explore what children need to recover from exposure to domestic violence

- A sense of physical and emotional safety in their current surroundings
- Structure, limits and predictability
- A strong bond with the non-battering parent
- Not feel responsible to take care of adults
- A strong bond to their siblings
- Contact with the battering parent in the context of protection for the child's physical and emotional safety

The authors offer the following 13 points to assess the risk to children from contact with men who batter:

1. Level of physical danger to the mother
2. History of physical abuse towards the children
3. History of sexual abuse or boundary violations towards the children
4. Level of psychological cruelty to the mother or the children
5. Level of coercive or manipulative control towards their partner exercised during the relationship
6. Level of entitlement and self-centeredness
7. History of using the children as weapons or undermining mother's parenting
8. History of placing children at physical or emotional risk while abusing the mother
9. History of neglectful or severely under-involved parenting
10. Refusal to accept the end of the relationship, or to accept the mother's decision to begin a new relationship
11. Level of risk to abduct the children
12. Substance abuse history
13. Mental Health History

Finally, recognizing that men who batter can change (though they rarely do), the authors offer several suggestions to assess the change in men who batter. This begins with recognizing that the perpetration of domestic violence has its roots in a definable set of attitudes, beliefs and behaviors, including:

- His belief in his right to use violence against a partner to impose his will (Silverman and Williamson, 1997)
- His sense of entitlement within the family (Edleson and Tolman, 1992)
- His patterns of controlling and manipulative behaviors (Lloyd and Emery, 2000)
- Disrespect for his partner and lack of empathy for her feelings (Russell and Frohberg, 1995, Pence and Paymar, 1993)
- Externalizing of responsibility for his action (Dutton, 1995)

Assessing Risk to Children from Batterers

Assessment of change in men, who batter, therefore must draw on multiple sources and include attention to the following issues:

- ✓ Has he made a *full* disclosure of his history of physical and psychological abuse?
- ✓ Has he recognized that abusive behavior is unacceptable?
- ✓ Has he recognized and accepted his abusive behavior was a choice?
- ✓ Does he show empathy for the effects of his action on his partner and children?
- ✓ Can he identify what his pattern of controlling behaviors and entitlements?
- ✓ Has he replaced abuse with respectful behaviors and attitudes?
- ✓ Is he willing to make amends in a meaningful way?
- ✓ Does he accept the consequences of his actions?

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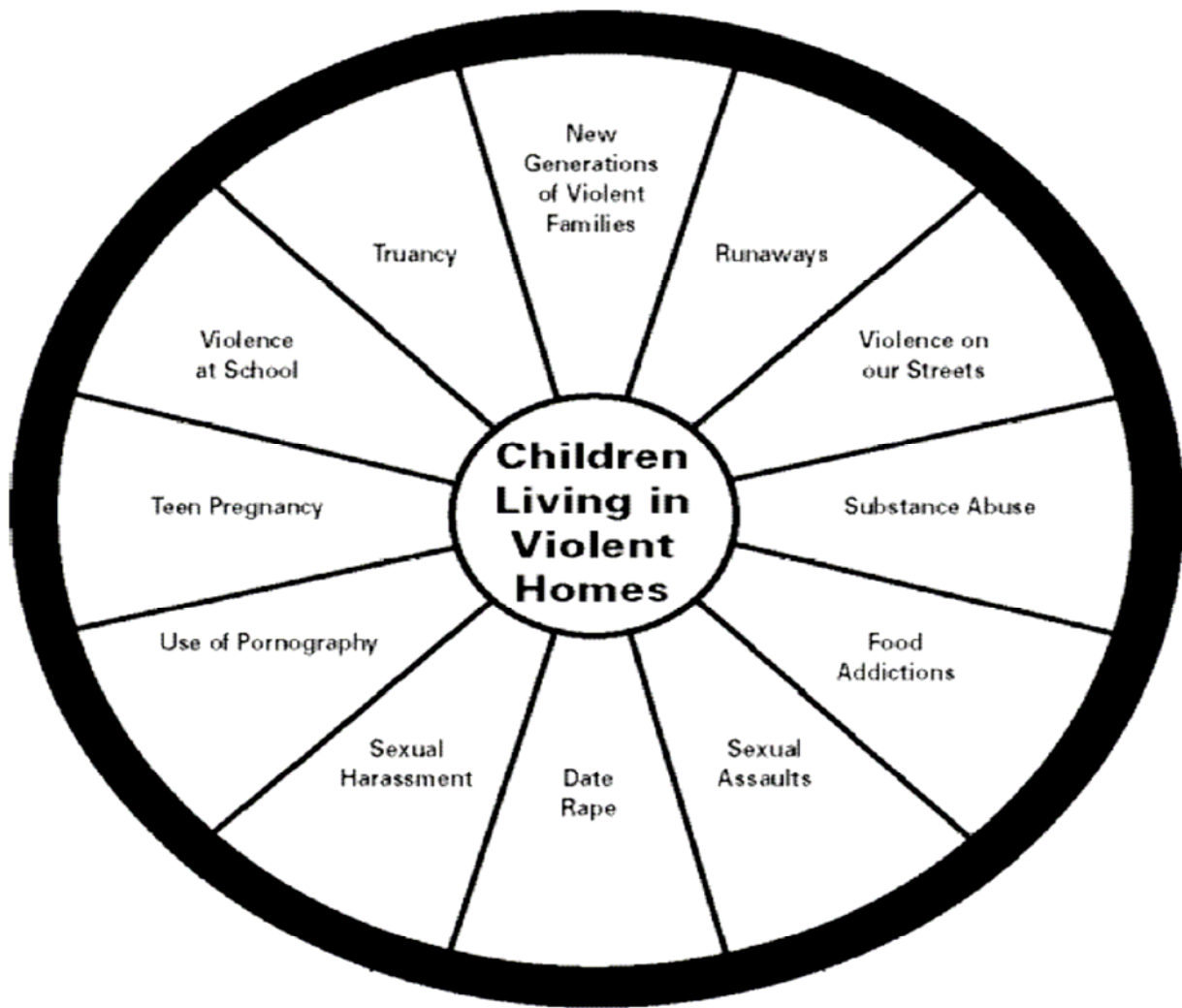
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**Module 8 – Reading 6**

Some Ways Domestic Violence Can Harm a Mother/Child Relationship

1. Abuse diminishes a mother's ability to parent well:
 - She may focus on survival and safety more than nurturing.
 - She may focus more on meeting the needs of the abuser than those of her children.
 - She may suffer mental illness, drug or alcohol abuse or poor physical health caused by the abuse.
2. Mothers may demand that children alter their behavior in order to avoid antagonizing the abuser.
3. Mothers may use safety and protection strategies that are no fun for their children.
4. Children may remind the mother of the abuser.
5. Children can become parentified, taking care of the mother and other children.
6. Mothers may demand secrecy and isolation of the children in order to keep the abuse secret.
7. A mother's shame and guilt about the abuse may inhibit her from talking openly with the children.
8. Mothers may deny the extent of the effects of exposure to abuse on their children.
9. The abuser's dominance prevents a mother from parenting as she chooses or negotiating parenting with him.
10. If a mother leaves the abuser, children will have to leave home, school friends and pets, and live in a shelter or less desirable housing.
11. If the abuser kills his partner, the children become motherless, and lose both parents if he is subsequently incarcerated.

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**Module 8 – Reading 7****Children Coping with Family Violence**

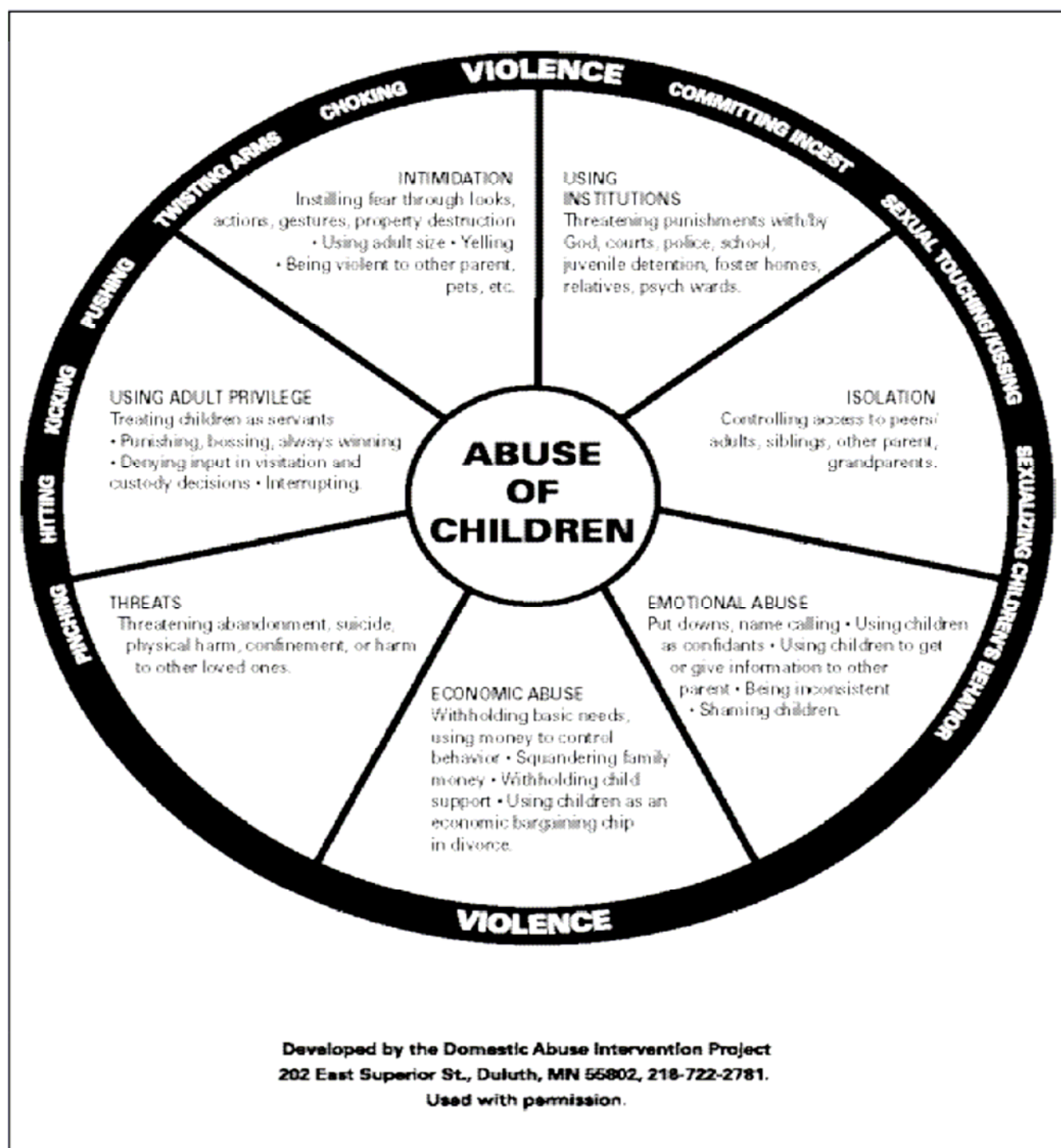
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Module 8 – Reading 8

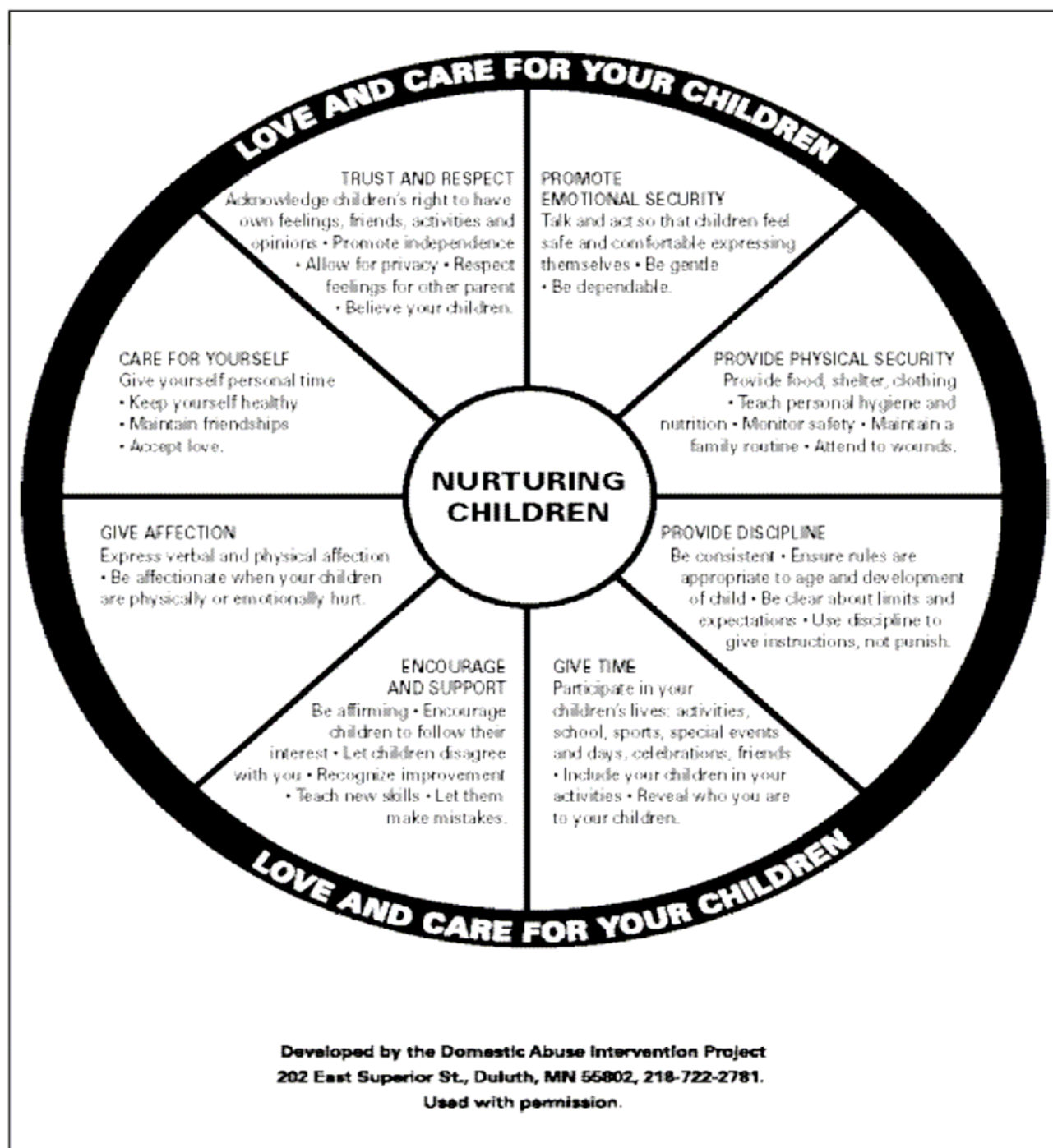
Abuse of Children





Module 8 – Reading 9

Nurturing Children





Module 8 – Reading 11

Key Issue

Intervention with Children Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence

Intervention has been shown to be one of the deciding factors in children's successful survival of the violence and abuse in their lives. Children exposed to domestic violence reap the same rewards from intervention as do children surviving any other kind of threat to their health and well-being. Children's advocates, counselors and volunteers in their work to end intimate partner violence have developed strategies to assist children in:

- understanding that no one deserves abuse—no matter what;*
- getting and staying safe;
- avoiding self-blame, by placing accountability with the perpetrator of abuse;
- enhancing self-esteem;
- succeeding in school; and
- gaining personal empowerment necessary in making positive life decisions

Throughout the past three decades, children's advocates have sought to provide meaningful interventions for children exposed to intimate partner violence. Domestic violence programs have historically concentrated on assisting children in safety planning, identifying and understanding the dynamics of domestic violence, breaking the secret of abuse by sharing their stories, learning alternatives to violence in conflict resolution and realizing that the abuse is not their fault. As programs have grown they have incorporated not only discussion, but also art, music, play, movement and other enriching activities in their work with children.

Individual (one-on-one) time with children is usually tailored to the needs of the particular child. Advocates and counselors realized early that "one-size-fits-all" programs were less effective than those that concentrated, as much as possible, on the specific needs of each child within each family.

Individualization is particularly important in the development of safety planning. This planning should be the primary focus of domestic violence program working with children. Initially, children's advocates and counselors work to assess the level of risk presented to each child. With input from both the child and the mother, the workers help the children to develop plans, which are appropriate to their age, ability and environment. The inclusion of safe adults in planning is important to assure facilitation and support for the children in implementing plans. Ideally, the children's plans are coordinated with the safety planning done with the mothers. Finally, in any action to be carried out by children, it is vital that they be given permission NOT to act. They need to be assured that inability to carry through does not constitute a failure on their parts. Children's implementation of safety plans is often thwarted by perpetrators.

Group work with children has taken many forms and is vital to the social skills of children whose models are frequently poor. Research has shown that some successful changes in children's self-esteem, sense of responsibility for the violence, attitudes about

use of violence, safety skills and peer support occur and that group provides children with a safe and fun environment in which to have positive social experiences. (Peled, 1997) Many curricula are available to guide children's advocates, counselors and volunteers in establishing successful intervention/prevention groups. Group work specific to the needs of children with disabilities, children of diverse cultures and children of varied ages is emerging. In this packet, we have included information on one program that addresses the needs of children with disabilities: *Kid & TeenSafe: An Abuse Prevention Program for Youth with Disabilities*, developed by SafePlace: Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Survival Center, Austin, TX

Though great strides have been made in children's services, since the inception of domestic violence shelters and outreach programs, services for children remain largely inconsistent. Some programs are restricted by financial constraints to the provision of only basic services, perhaps only having one staff member who provides occasional childcare. Other programs are able to hire child advocates and counselors to oversee a wide variety of counseling and advocacy services for child clients.

REFERENCE

- Peled, E., (1997). The battered women's movement response to children of battered women: A critical analysis. *Violence Against Women*, 3 (4), 424-446.

The following articles and resource lists were chosen as representations of current research taking place on intervention with children exposed to intimate partner violence:

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- Schewe, Paul A. & University of Illinois (Champaign) Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Team. *Interventions for children exposed to domestic violence*. Paper presented to Illinois Department of Human Services. Retrieved March 26, 2002 from <http://www.uic.edu/depts/psch/idhs/Childwitnesses.htm>
- Domestic Violence Enhanced Response Team. (2000). *Safety Champion Coloring Activity Book*. Colorado Springs, CO: Colorado Springs Police Department.
- NRC Children's Web Site Resource List
- NRC Children's Video Resource List
- NRC Children's Direct Service Tools Resource List

**Module 8 – Reading 12**

Some Ways to Make a Domestic Violence Program More Family Centered

This is not a list of "shoulds." It is a list of some ideas that can improve a domestic violence program's ability to respond to domestic abuse as it is experienced by the whole family.

- Salaries, job responsibilities and occasions for program input are equal for women's and children's advocates.
- Services for children and youth are supported by the same basic program elements as services for women, such as job-specific new staff training, written policies and procedures and training opportunities.
- Volunteers and program supplies are allocated equitably between women's and children's programs. Space allocation accounts for the varied needs of children's programming.
- All program staff and volunteers receive training on the effects of domestic violence on all age groups and all family members.
- Adult victims of domestic violence and children and youth from violent homes are mentioned equally in all program materials and publications.
- Community education presentations on domestic violence include information on the effects of domestic abuse on children, youth, older battered women and other family members.
- Staff at all levels of the organization engage in regular, ongoing discussions about the relationship between services for women and those for children, youth and older battered women.
- Battered women with children are recognized as mothers, and mothers are viewed as experts on their own children.
- Crisis line staff inquire about the well being of children when talking with battered mothers without blaming mothers for threats to their children's safety.
- All mothers receive information about the effects of domestic violence on their children in order to support their efforts as parents.
- Mothers are provided with continuous opportunities to discuss with staff and each other the impact domestic violence has had on their children.
- Mothers met and talk with the staff working with their children, and children and youth meet and talk with the staff working with their mothers.

- For shelter residents, when house rules are explained at intake, mothers are asked how these rules are different from rules in their homes and whether enforcing these rules with their children will be difficult.
- The program consistently uses a team approach to collaboration between women's and children's advocates. Team members meet regularly to coordinate services for each family.
- Women's advocates are directly involved in some activities with children and youth. Children's advocates are directly involved in some activities with women.
- Coordinated safety planning: Families meet together to do safety planning. Children understand their mother's safety plans and are prepared for actions she may take to protect herself and them, and mothers are aware of their children's safety plans so they can support these plans. Single battered women, including older battered women, are invited to include a family member or other support person when they prepare their safety plan.
- Mothers are informed about the content of each child's support group and children receive explanations of what their mothers are doing in each adult support group.
- Content of adult and children's support groups is coordinated (e.g. both groups cover the same topic on the same night) so that mothers and children can support one another around their mutual experiences of coping with domestic abuse.
- The program sponsors a regularly scheduled parenting support group for mothers.
- The program sponsors regularly scheduled joint support groups for battered women and their children.
- The program sponsors family domestic violence support groups where families can discuss with each other the impact that living with domestic violence has had on their lives.
- Organized family activities are planned and attended by women, children, and staff in a variety of different positions.
- There is adequate staffing for children's services so that children's staff are not stretched too thin or required to perform an unreasonably wide range of job skills and responsibilities. For example, responsibility for direct services to children (such as intake, individual advocacy and support groups) and responsibility for outreach services regarding the effects of domestic abuse on children (such as public education to schools and community groups) are separate full time jobs.

- The amount and quality of age appropriate services offered to women and to children and youth, both in house and community based, is approximately equal.
- A range of age-appropriate services are available for teen victims of domestic violence.
- Abusers treatment covers how domestic violence has harmed the abusers' ability to parent well.
- Legal advocates talk with mothers about ways abusers may use children to violate restraining orders.
- Mothers receive advice and assistance in explaining domestic violence related legal procedures to their children.
- The agency engages in collaboration and cross training with guardian ad litem, child protective services, adult protective services, Family Court Counseling Service, Juvenile Court, Family Court, and Family Resource Centers.
- Youth are involved in the agency in roles such as direct service volunteers, speakers bureau, trainers, staff and board members.
- The agency is organized to deliver family centered services, where staff serving women and their children and the work they do are as unified as possible.

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